

Oral History Program

California State University, Sacramento, California  
Japanese American Citizens League, Florin Chapter

Oral History Interview

with

MOLLY MIYAKO KIMURA  
nee NAKAMURA

February 2, 1995  
Opper Way  
Sacramento, California

Hiroko Tsuda, Interviewer  
Japanese American Citizens League  
Florin Chapter



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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### INTERVIEWER

Hiroko Tsuda, R.N., M.F.C.C., is a member of the Oral History Project, Florin Japanese American Citizens League.

### INTERVIEW TIME AND PLACE

February 22, 1995 1st Interview  
May 21, 1996 2nd Interview  
All interviews were held at the home of:  
Mr. and Mrs. Kazuo Kimura  
1700 Oppen Avenue  
Sacramento, California 95822

### TRANSCRIBING AND EDITING

Transcribed by Judy S. Fukuman, a member and secretary of the Florin J.A.C.L. and Office Manager for the California Department of Justice, Office of Attorney General.

Edited by Molly Kimura and Hiroko Tsuda.

### PHOTOGRAPHY

Dan Inouye reproduced some of the pictures from the Kimura collection.

### TAPES AND INTERVIEW RECORD

Copies of the bound transcript and the tapes will be kept by the Florin Japanese American Citizens League and in the University Archives at the Library, California State University, Sacramento, 6000 J Street, Sacramento, California 95819.



## **BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY**

Molly Miyako Kimura was born on March 1st, 1924, in Yuba City, California. She is a nisei. Both her parents were immigrants who came from Hiroshima, Japan. Her mother was a very devout Jodo Shinshu Buddhist, who was loving and compassionate toward her family and neighbors. Her father was a very successful businessman, who was very influential in the Japanese community of Marysville. Through the influence of her mother, Molly, very early in life, became interested in the Japanese culture. She learned the Japanese language and culture simultaneously with the American language and culture.

Because of a family crisis which she endured as a sixteen year old. Molly reached out and embraced spiritual guidance. This experience was very meaningful for her, and she resolved to learn more about the teachings of the Dharma (Buddhist teachings). She has served as a Buddhist Sunday School teacher to young children and adults for over thirty-five years. Now as an ordained minister of the first rank, she has the credentials to continue to spread the Buddhist teachings here and abroad.

In 1942, in her high school senior year, the U.S. Government ordered all people of Japanese ancestry into concentration camps because Japan was at war with the U.S. Molly and her family were sent to Tule Lake Relocation Center. Rather than fighting the illegalities of this Executive Order, Molly accepted her fate and made the best of the situation. while in camp she took various cultural classes to enhance her interests and talents, and returned from camp multi-talented and wiser. Her particular interests centered around studying the Buddhist religion, flower arranging of the Ikenobo School, and playing the Biwa (Japanese lute) while singing Japanese classical songs.

With her multi-talents she has been an asset to the community of Sacramento: She was co-founder and past president of the Sacramento Chapter Ikebana International, and has taught both at home and via classes of the Rio Consumnes Community Colleges; she demonstrates Ikebana and other Japanese cultures to local garden clubs, schools, and service clubs, as well as, other Northern California communities; she has served as a board member of the Matsuyama-Sacramento Sister City Corporation since 1981; also, board member of Jinan, China-Sacramento Sister City Corporation from 1985; active member of the Sacramento Convention & Visitors Bureau. She provides interpreting and narrating services to many visiting Japanese artists, musicians, dancers, businessmen, physicians, and nurses.



Because of her community involvement, Molly has received many awards honoring her endeavors to enhance cultural awareness and improve human relationships among all cultures and races. In 1971, she was one of ten recipients of the Sacramento Union newspaper Women of the Year Award.

As this 20th Century comes to a close, and redress and reparation becomes a part of World War II history, Molly in her seventies continues undaunted. Her world is a world of continuous service and we Sacramentans have deeply benefitted from her perpetual energy.



This interview is with Molly Miyako Kimura, nee Nakamura. Molly is a 70 year old Nisei woman, who was born on March 1st, 1924. Today's date is February 2nd, 1995. This interview is being conducted in her home on Oppen Way in Sacramento, California. My name is Hiroko Tsuda and this work is being recorded for the Oral History Projects of both the Florin J.A.C.L. and the Sacramento State University in Sacramento.

[Session 1, February 2, 1995]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

TSUDA:

Molly, in 1993, after you were graduated from the three-year Nishi-Hongwanji Chuo Buddhist Correspondents Division in Kyoto, Japan, a Japanese newspaper woman described you as a powerful woman. Indeed you are a powerful resourceful woman because you are multi-talented in all facets of the Japanese culture, namely, the language, Buddhist religion, arts, and traditional music. For the sake of history,



I feel privileged to conduct this interview with you. Let us begin.

Where were you born? Were you born at home or in a hospital?

KIMURA: I was born in Yuba City, California, and I was born at home.

TSUDA: What were your parents' names and which prefecture in Japan were they from?

KIMURA: My father's name was Nobujiro Nakamura and my mother's name was Motoyo Nakamura and they came from Hiroshima, Japan.

TSUDA: What was your mother's maiden name?

KIMURA: My mother's maiden name was Motoyo Takayama.

TSUDA: Are they both from Hiroshima?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: What were your parents' occupations?

KIMURA: My father always liked business so he owned furniture stores and he also sold automobiles.

TSUDA: Did they suffer during the Depression years?

KIMURA: I'm sure they did but they were a little better off than people who were farming at that time.

TSUDA: So you always led a comfortable life, would you say?

KIMURA: Yes, yes. We had been very fortunate that we did. Well, it's not as comfortable as now, but still we survived.



TSUDA: And how many siblings do you have and what is your birth order?

KIMURA: I have two sisters and one brother. My oldest sister is 85 years old and living in San Jose, my second sister is 80 years and my brother, who is the youngest in our family is 68 now.

TSUDA: What are their names?

KIMURA: My oldest sister's name is Helen Iwasaki, the other sister's name is Kathryn Sato and my brother's name is Joe Nakamura.

TSUDA: How long have you been married to Kazuo and what is his occupation?

KIMURA: I've been married 41 years to my husband, Kaz Kimura, and he is a retired pharmacist.

TSUDA: How many children do you have and what are their names and occupations?

KIMURA: We have two children. The older one is daughter Sylvia who lives in Berkeley and she commutes to San Francisco to work in a hospital there as bio-medical technician. Our son lives in San Francisco and he works part-time for Safeway, and he'll be graduating from San Francisco State College majoring in chemistry.

TSUDA: What kind of childhood did you have?

KIMURA: I had a -- I think I did have a very happy life because my father was



such an active businessman and he was always providing us and he was also dedicated in promoting the Japanese language and the Buddhist Church and he's been very hard-working man.

TSUDA: What do you remember about your father while you were growing up?

KIMURA: Well, while we were growing up, we had to be very respectful to him because he was sort of typical Japanese Issei--macho, should I say (laughter). And my mother who was so generous and sweet and kind--we all had to follow him. And my mother always was so nice to people that I still remember during the Depression years she used to provide even clothing for families that were really in poverty. We had some neighbors in that area we lived where they had big families, eight children, and they still remember my mother to this date.

TSUDA: What school did you attend in Marysville?

KIMURA: I attended Marysville Elementary School for eight years. We had K through 8th grade and then after that I graduated from Marysville Union High School, and that's when the war started and we went to--we were not able to go to our graduation commencement exercises because of the travel curfew.

TSUDA: What year did you graduate from high school?



KIMURA: June 1942.

TSUDA: So you didn't receive a diploma from them?

KIMURA: We did receive it.

TSUDA: How did you receive it.

KIMURA: They mailed the diploma to us, and my girlfriend, Amelba, who was supposed to be the valedictorian was not able to present her speech, so her graduation diploma was mailed to her, too.

TSUDA: So Amelba is Japanese?

KIMURA: Uh huh.

TSUDA: So how did you feel about that?

KIMURA: Well, we always used to feel that we were discriminated and yet I sort of accepted that and I think it's because of my--when I was a teenager, you know, there was a turning point in life that I really was exposed to religion so deeply that we were taught that you have to accept things as they come instead of worrying or getting depressed.

TSUDA: Okay. Molly, did you experience prejudice from your classmates or teachers?

KIMURA: Not so much from the classmates. I think they kind of sympathized, but I remember some of the teachers who used to sort of discriminate us. I still remember there was one teacher who always



used to tell us that he experienced prejudice during World War I so he felt that this was coming to us.

TSUDA: So did you feel that was fair?

KIMURA: I felt that was not fair and I thought that was an unnecessary statement for the teacher to talk to us.

TSUDA: And were you assertive and tell him about that?

KIMURA: Ah, no, no. We were very abiding--accepting of everything as it came along.

TSUDA: Okay. When the Executive Order 9066 was passed, what were your feelings?

KIMURA: I was very, very sad to think we are American citizenship of Japanese ancestry and this was a great blow to us.

TSUDA: What did you think about your status of being Japanese American? Were you bitter about being interned?

KIMURA: Well, in a way I was bitter, but in a way it was nice that all of us were headed for relocation center and we were able to have an opportunity to learn things.

TSUDA: So there was always a good and bad?

KIMURA: Oh, yeah. Yes, I think so.

TSUDA: Okay. Which camp were you interned during World War II?



KIMURA: Instead of going through Assembly Center, we directly were sent to Tulelake Relocation Center.

TSUDA: And can you describe (what) for me what Tulelake was like?

KIMURA: Well, the life in Tulelake, as you know, the government built barracks and we had community bathrooms and community laundry room and then we went to mess hall to have our meals just like the military people were. I imagine because it was--this came so suddenly that the government must have really quickly have to build these barracks and they felt this was the only system they could follow.

TSUDA: Were they comfortable?

KIMURA: I don't think it was comfortable because we were all crammed into one room. Four of us.

TSUDA: Your whole family?

KIMURA: Yeah, four of us. Well, my two sisters were already married, but my brother, myself, and my parents--four of us were in a small room.

TSUDA: How did you have privacy then?

KIMURA: Well, we build up--we put curtains around and build up some walls and had a little privacy, not much.

TSUDA: So you were a high school graduate and you were deprived from going to college.



KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: But what school did you attend since graduation from high school?

KIMURA: After I came back I worked for a while at Camp Beale and then after that I decided to go into technical school so I went to San Jose to attend fashion design school and I studied two years there and then--from then on I went to Los Angeles to start another two years.

TSUDA: I think we're jumping a little bit ahead of our history here because I want you to talk more about camp life, so I want to know whether--did you work while you were in camp? And what kind of work?

KIMURA: I worked in the mess hall because I had time and opportunity to learn Japanese language and I began learning Japanese flower arrangement and I had opportunity to do also study tea ceremony. And also at that time there were knitting classes and sewing classes. So I took every opportunity to learn while I was in the relocation center for three years.

TSUDA: Which culture did you enjoy the most?

KIMURA: Well, I enjoyed continuing my Japanese language classes and also the Ikebana classes.

TSUDA: And how many years of Japanese language did you have before you



went to camp?

KIMURA: Well, I started my Japanese language at the age of three. Close to fifteen years, I went to Japanese language every day from Monday through Friday after coming back from the American public schools.

TSUDA: And in camp, you continued?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: Was it like college courses or was it like...

KIMURA: It's more or less like college courses because we had many, many school teachers, you know, and Buddhist ministers who were asked to set up Japanese language so I still remember that there was a college professor from the Imperial University who was from L. A. He gave us a course on Chinese character "Kanbu" and none of us-- there was about six students in the class and none of us could even understand what he was trying to present to us.

TSUDA: It was that difficult?

KIMURA: Difficult.

TSUDA: Do you understand what he was trying to present?

KIMURA: Yes, but since we didn't have any textbooks, the teachers had access to some textbooks and they had to write mimeograph. It was those days that we didn't have any copy machines like now so they had to



write everything and mimeograph and then bind the books and then present it to us.

TSUDA: When you talk about camp life, what, starting with the month, what month did you go in and what month did you come out?

KIMURA: Ah, we were sent in July of 1942, and I came out of Tulelake relocation September of 1945. The war ended in August.

TSUDA: Now, I understand that you used to teach Sunday School, Buddhist Sunday School before you went to camp and then in camp what did you do with your Buddhism religion?

KIMURA: I was helping with the Marysville Buddhist Sunday School for about two years before the war started. And during the Tulelake Relocation, my friends and I set up Sunday School in the recreation hall and we were teaching Sunday School every Sunday. And at the same time, we had so many Buddhist ministers from the island of Hawaii that they used to give sermons 6 o'clock in the morning. And we used to walk about a mile to different recreation hall to attend services.

TSUDA: How old were you then?

KIMURA: Ah, I was between eighteen to twenty-one.

TSUDA: Who would you name as your mentor of getting interested in



Buddhism?

KIMURA: My mother was the one that kind of encouraged and inspired me to get into Buddhism. And I'm glad she did because otherwise I will not be in my status now. I mean it was my turning point in life was sixteen years old when she really inspired me to listen further in understanding about Buddhism.

TSUDA: Did you ever go through a period of rebelliousness while you were a teenager?

KIMURA: Oh, not so much. No so much because I guess I had a happy life.

TSUDA: Okay, and what does Buddhism mean to you? I know that is a profound lengthy, probably discourse could be on your part, but what does Buddhism mean to you in a nutshell?

KIMURA: Well, Buddhism is a way of life and it has always given me great energy spiritually to keep on living and to share the wonderful life that is laid for myself and at my age I like to--while I'm healthy, I like to share the wonderful teachings of Jodo-Shinshin, Pure Land Sect.

TSUDA: So you had a lifelong quest, would you say, in attaining certain, I guess, theoretic reason, enlightenment, and you are enjoying your



path, I take it?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: Okay, so we'll go back to Buddhism in a little while. Let's see. Who made arrangements for you to leave camp and where did you go?

KIMURA: Well, after the war, the War Relocation Project released announcement that you are able to leave, so I left with my friends to Los Angeles. I tried to get into school but somehow it didn't work out because my....Since we had property in Marysville, in Sacramento, my father had already returned to Marysville so this is the reason I came back to Marysville.

TSUDA: Did you feel comfortable to be among the mainstream American society again?

KIMURA: At first, I felt very, very--kind of peculiar to be outside being confined in relocation for three years. But, I was able to kind of mix into the society.

TSUDA: Do you have any anecdotes, funny or serious that you experienced during this transition phase from internee to free person, if you want to call it free person?

KIMURA: Oh, I just don't have any. I just can't think of any anecdotes, but I mean, my motivation in life is that you really have to work hard to



accomplish things.

TSUDA: And I'm sure you've worked very hard. Okay, so what schools have you attended since camp?

KIMURA: Since camp, I attended the model fashion design school and then after that I started taking more interest in Japanese culture, so I started taking lessons in flower arrangement, tea ceremony, and sand painting.

TSUDA: So when you said you went to this modern fashion school, did you learn how to draft your own patterns?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: And you sold....

KIMURA: Design and go into tailoring everything.

TSUDA: So then after you got out of camp, too, you continued to teaching Sunday School?

KIMURA: Yes. So I've been teaching Sunday School close to forty years now ever since I returned to Sacramento.

TSUDA: And you received some awards, haven't you? Can you name me some awards that you have received? Please name me those awards because I think it would be of interest to the public.

KIMURA: In 1969, I received from Sacramento YWCA, the Sacramento YWCA



Cultural Award. Although I was Buddhist, I was asked to serve on the Sacramento YWCA Board of Directors, and I worked very closely in volunteering my services so this was my recognition. In 1971, I was recipient of one of the ten women of the year award given by Sacramento Union Newspaper. In 1987, I received from the Western Adult Buddhist League, "Kyogoku Award," which was for outstanding Buddhist Sunday School teacher. Also in 1987, I received a resolution from Mayor of Sacramento and the City Council to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of teaching Ikebana and propagating Japanese cultural programs in Sacramento. On March 1st, 1991, I received from Sacramento Matsuyama Sister City Corporation during the Sacramento Camellia Festival, a President's Award, for serving ten years in promoting friendship between the two cities. On April 3rd, 1991, in Matsuyama, Japan, I received "Outstanding Services" for promoting sister city exchanges between the two cities for ten years. And this was presented by the former mayor of Matsuyama [Nakamura].

TSUDA: May I have that list. I want to go over it a little bit. Going over this list, Molly, what would you say you did that was most rewarding in receiving this YWCA Cultural Award? After all, that's the Young



Women's Christian Association, and here you are a Buddhist. So could you tell me about that?

KIMURA: Yes. Ever since I helped to organize an international organization in 1959, which is Sacramento Chapter Ikebana International with headquarters in Tokyo, I have been fostering international peace and harmony through the chapters. And so receiving this honor was, I think, a very rewarding experience for me.

TSUDA: Congratulations for all of them! Okay. Then you received one of the ten Woman of the Year Award, Sacramento Union. Now, what do you think led to this award?

KIMURA: Since, particularly through the establishment of Ikebana International Chapter here and also with the Sacramento Buddhist Church Cultural Festival, every year we have been propagating Japanese cultural programs and through these mediums, I think, people have recognized my....

TSUDA: Talent.

KIMURA: Well, not the talent, but the sort of service award.

TSUDA: Didn't you meet Mrs. Reagan through one of, some of these activities?

KIMURA: Yes, in 1963, we had a regional convention at the present Raddison



Hotel where many of the dignitaries came from Tokyo and Washington, D.C., and at that time, we presented an invitation to Mrs. Reagan and also to Mrs. Bernice Brown.

TSUDA: When you say Mrs. Reagan, you mean Mrs. Ronald Reagan.

KIMURA: Ronald Reagan, yes.

TSUDA: The ex-president now, and he was governor at that time.

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: Now, in 1987, you received the "Kyogoku" Award. Can you tell me what is the "Kyogoku" Award?

KIMURA: Reverend Kyogoku was a very outstanding Buddhist minister who established this award every year for over thirty years to outstanding leader of Young Buddhist Association and then also for the Sunday School and also for Junior and Senior Y.B.A. I was recognized that year.

TSUDA: And again in 1987, you received a resolution from the mayor of Sacramento and the City Council to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of teaching of Ikebana. So Ikebana has been one of your main activities, hasn't it through the years?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: You know, March 1st, you received the President's Award from the



Sacramento-Matsuyama Sister City Association. Are you still active in this Matsuyama Sister City organization?

KIMURA: Yes. I'm still on the board. And next year the organization will be celebrating 15th Anniversary.

TSUDA: What will happen then?

KIMURA: I'm sure there will be some kind of celebration and exchanges. And then also I was asked to serve on the Chinese Sister City, Jinan-Sacramento Sister City Association, and this organization will be celebrating the 10th Anniversary this year. And I have been serving on their board and also I had been recording secretary for many years. So this organization is going to have a tour of China in the fall.

TSUDA: You've been to China already, haven't you?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: In what capacity?

KIMURA: I have been to China four times. In 1981, my very best girlfriend who is Chinese-American who instigated all the tours for the U.S.-China Peoples' Friendship Society had encouraged me to go to Japan. So, my sister--my oldest sister was in Manchuria in 1934 so she and her friends and I joined a tour to China in 1981. And after that my



girlfriend organized Sister City program and so I went along with her, too. And in 1983 and 1985, I was tour leader for both groups, when the Chinese Buddhist Association sponsored our tour. And on each group we had Buddhist ministers as assistant tour leaders.

TSUDA: Do you think that the Sister Cities' organizations have been invaluable in promoting peace--international peace?

KIMURA: Yes, I think so. And also the sister cities have encouraged exchanges with education and youth programs and also economic relationships. And through their direct contacts and exchanges, I'm sure would further promote friendship and world peace.

TSUDA: And then, lastly on this list is that you received an "Outstanding Service" award from the Matsuyama, Japan, the mayor of Matsuyama gave you this award. Can you tell me your feelings about receiving that award?

KIMURA: Well, actually I was at the right time at the right place when there was a talk going on about affiliating sister city program, so more or less I was the co-founder of this organization. This is the reason why I was recognized and am still being on the board and trying to promote exchanges.

TSUDA: How many times have you gone to Matsuyama or Japan in regards



to the Matsuyama Sister City organization?

KIMURA: Oh, I've been to Matsuyama about five times. However, I have been to Japan sixteen times.

TSUDA: I know that you have been to Japan at least twice in your studies of, furthering your studies in Buddhism. Now, how did you decide to take the three-year study course in Buddhism to work towards your ordination?

KIMURA: I have....Studying and listening to Buddhism was my lifetime interest and so, when I saw the Wheel of Dharma recruiting students for this program, I applied, and I believe I was the first Japanese American because this program is all in Japanese so you have to read and write to enroll in this program and to be recognized by the school. And so I was very fortunate to be accepted into this program.

TSUDA: Can you tell me the name of this school and what were the contents of the courses studied over the years.

KIMURA: The name of this school is what the . . . . Our Nishi-Hongwanji has two universities in Kyoto and the main school, as you know, is the Ryukoku University where most of the ministers are enrolled and the second one is the Chuo Buddhist Institute. I went to Chuo Buddhist Institute Correspondence Division School in Kyoto and during the



course of study, you know, every year we receive five textbooks. They were on world religions, Japanese Buddhism, and Jodo-Shinshu Study I and II, and then also the structure of temple headquarters. And also on top of that they had study on the chanting of sutra. From these textbooks, we were required to submit three essays every year, and in addition we had to. . . . we received five essays, of examination essays, which have to be submitted and graded upon. And the course was conducted only in Japanese language. And I attended a seminar annually to complete the course and the sites that I attended were Tokyo Tsukiji Hongwanji and Toyama Betsuin and Kyoto Moto Kaikan near the headquarters.

TSUDA: And how was graduation like for you?

KIMURA: Graduation was very inspirational to me because it was held in the main temple of the Nishi-Hongwanji headquarters.

TSUDA: Are you continuing with the alumni association?

KIMURA: Yes, upon graduation, we were all asked to. . . .

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

KIMURA: Upon graduation, all the students are required to join the alumni association and it usually meets every year and during throughout the



year they have seminars in different areas of Japan.

TSUDA: How have you contributed so far to this alumni association?

KIMURA: Well, actually, I have not contributed anything but I hope to write some essays in the annual magazine.

TSUDA: Okay. How close are you now to ordination?

KIMURA: Well, it's going to require lots of red tape, but hopefully within a year or so, I hope I could get into this program.

TSUDA: Today, February 2nd, 1995, you just received happy news, didn't you? Can you tell us about that?

KIMURA: Well, I just received through a close minister [friend] in Japan there are possibilities of applying for ordination and for training for ten days at the Nishi Honganji through special efforts of the Buddhist minister in Shiga Prefecture so I hope to pursue this.

TSUDA: How do you feel about having been only the . . . the only Nisei among 362 graduates?

KIMURA: Well, I think it was a great privilege and honor for me to be selected, and my wish is to convey the teachings in the United States. When I was interviewed at the Nishi-Hongwanji Newspaper, that's what I stated and they were very happy because the motto of Nishi-Hongwanji is now is to propagate Jodo Shinshu teachings to the



children and to their grandchildren and to people all over the world.

TSUDA: What do you believe is the future of Buddhism in America?

KIMURA: Well, I hate to answer this question, but there's a lot of development that has to be done in this area. Each one of us would have to really realize the importance of religion to prevent the crime and particularly among the juvenile delinquents and all the crime that has been taking place in our societies.

TSUDA: Sometimes, some people call it American Buddhism. Is there such a thing as American Buddhism as opposed to Japanese Buddhism?

KIMURA: Well, since we live in America, we should try to propagate to the American Buddhism. Jodo Shinshu teaching is not only for Japanese Americans. Its for the people all over the United States and throughout the world. So in order to communicate, I think we have to improve many, many ways of teaching.

TSUDA: You have a travel and a translating business right now, don't you?

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: Can you tell us about each one?

KIMURA: Well, over about fifteen years ago, I was asked to help with the sales of discount tickets by a particular company in San Francisco to help so many Japanese-speaking former military wives that live in



Sacramento, because, as you know, we have three military bases and to help them out to better communicate in Japanese, I was selected. So I'm still doing it, not too much, but whenever I do have calls, I do try to help them. And also I was asked to become a travel consultant because the Sacramento Convention Center was looking for a bilingual persons or company who could respond to the many inquiries they receive from Japanese travel agencies from San Francisco and Los Angeles. Mainly to act as Japanese-speaking guide for the visitors to the Sacramento area. Sacramento being the capitol, there are many, many people from Japan visiting Sacramento.

TSUDA: Who are some of the notable persons that you have helped to . . . with interpretation or translations in Sacramento?

KIMURA: Well, when you say notable in the cultural field, I was asked to interpret for the headmasters.

TSUDA: Of which schools?

KIMURA: Ikenobo School.

TSUDA: What was he like?

KIMURA: Well, he is the forty-fifth direct descendant of the masters of Japan in Kyoto and Ikenobo School is the originator of all the flower arrangement schools existing in Japan and the school has been in



existence for over five-hundred years. And they're very proud of that history. So it was kind of interesting to interpret for the headmaster and also many of the tea masters used to visit Sacramento so I was able to help them, too. And also sand painting headmaster has come through and collage and many, many artists have come through Sacramento.

TSUDA: In your translating business, how do you run that business?

KIMURA: I get inquiries through phone or fax from different agencies. I have about ten accounts now from both Los Angeles and Sacramento. . . San Francisco, excuse me. And so I try to accommodate them by providing their request. Sometimes I have to provide bus services, guide services, and occasionally to provide class A interpreters. And I have few part-time staff members helping me.

TSUDA: Where do attribute all your energy to? Do you take exercises, or go for walks or what do you do?

KIMURA: Well, the past about four years I have been exercising every morning at the recreation. . . not recreation but the city parks where they provide exercises for forty-five minutes. We also walk, too.

TSUDA: What is it called?

KIMURA: Well, it was. . . it's not Tai-Chi. We also have Tai-Chi once a week



but this exercise program was instigated by a lady in Hong Kong, and a Chinese lady here in Sacramento went to Hong Kong to learn and she's been teaching for over ten years now. I think that has really given me a lot of energy. And also spiritually my religion has upheld my spirits [laughter] and some people are very amazed at my energy at my age, but I have to keep on going.

TSUDA: Well, I hope that you keep on going for a long time to come, Molly. You also teach Chikuzen Bi-wa, could you please tell us about that?

KIMURA: Well, I'm going to start teaching again.

TSUDA: What is that instrument like?

KIMURA: It's a lute. It's a Japanese lute, five-strings instrument and we have to cultivate the study of voice training, too, because instrument provides as accompaniment for the songs that we sing and the songs consist of telling the story about a famous warrior or singing about many feudal wars that were happening in Japan.

TSUDA: Okay, Molly, what kind of life do you foresee for your children and grandchildren?

KIMURA: I'd like to have my children be more exposed to our religion and culture. But at the present time, they're so busy working that one of these days they will probably realize, however, when my daughter was



growing up, I tried to expose her to many Japanese cultures and language. I sent her eight years to the Buddhist Church language school program, and, also, I taught her how to sew and also I got her exposed, a little bit, to flower arrangement and tea ceremony and even sand-painting, too. But I feel that at the moment they're busy, but as they grow older, they might be able to appreciate our culture because they have been shown some of the essence of our Japanese culture.

TSUDA: You planted the seed, in other words.

KIMURA: Yes.

TSUDA: How old are they now?

KIMURA: My daughter is forty and my son is thirty-seven.

TSUDA: And neither one is married?

KIMURA: No. So this is the reason why I'm not blessed with grandchildren.

TSUDA: Yet! [Laughter]

KIMURA: Although I love children [Laughter].

TSUDA: Okay, I hope that you will have some grandchildren some day.

KIMURA: Hopefully.

TSUDA: Have you discussed the war experience with your children?

KIMURA: Not too much, but they have read many books on war experiences of the Japanese-Americans.



the Japanese-Americans.

TSUDA: Do you think you have passed down some of the Nisei traits like "enryo," "ga-man," working hard to your children?

KIMURA: I think so. I try to expose them to our wonderful traits being Japanese-American, but I don't know how much they realize.

TSUDA: As you reflect on your past years, what memories stand out the most, starting with the happiest and then the saddest memories?

KIMURA: You know actually I have not experienced not too much sadness; however, I could state that I have been very blessed and grateful for my health and for a good husband and not outstanding children but at least they are normal children that does not give me headaches.

TSUDA: So that kind of sums up your happiest and saddest memories? All right. Okay, if you were given the chance to do your life over, would you change any part of it?

KIMURA: If so, I think I would like to go into study more of the traditions of the Japanese culture. I'd like to. . . if I had the time, I'd like to. . . and also I'd like to learn the Chinese language, too, because of the fact that I have traveled to China so many times, I think I could appreciate their culture, too, by learning their language.

TSUDA: So you still want to learn a lot more.



KIMURA: If I have time, but at this point, I just don't have time because I'm sharing the culture to many people.

TSUDA: If you were giving advice to young people today, what would you tell them?

KIMURA: I would always advise them to study hard. If you study hard, you could achieve things and also I would like to direct them to know a little bit about religion so they could reflect their life each day.

TSUDA: Molly, I wish to thank you for this wonderful interview and very remarkable, historical account of your life. As we come to close this interview today, do you wish to make a statement.

KIMURA: Yes, I would like to state that if all the young people and adults will realize how wonderful land we live in, however, there are so many crime taking place every day that, in order to prevent those crimes, I wish they would really work hard to understand yourself and others and to promote peace and harmony so that we will have a wonderful life on this earth.

TSUDA: Thank you very much, Molly, for taking the time to allow us this interview. Thank you.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Session 2, May 21, 1996]



[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

TSUDA: The date is May 21, 1996, and Molly and I are now gathered in her house resuming her oral history which we initially taped on February 2nd, 1995. The reason for this second tape is to include significant life events which have occurred since then. The two events are: (1) That Molly successfully completed her long-term goal of ordination into the Buddhist priesthood, and (2) she was instrumental in the planting of thirty-three Yoshino cherry trees donated by Dr. and Mrs. Yoshihiro Hamaguchi of Hiroshima, Japan, in Belle Cooledge Park in South Sacramento. Molly, please update us on your experience which led you to your ordination as a Buddhist priest?

KIMURA: Last year, I was fortunate in receiving encouragement and sponsorship of a head minister in Shiga Prefecture. The temple is known as Enkyuji; and, through his encouragement, I was able to go to Japan on October 7th to take an examination to prepare myself to enter into a training to become ordained as a Buddhist priest. I took the written examination and I passed it. So, I was now ready to enroll in this program from November 3rd to November 11th of 1995, and I was enrolled at the Nishi-Hongwanji, Nishiyama Betsuin Training Center. I went through ten days of very rigid, ascetic



training to be ordained as the priest in the Nishi-Hongwanji Buddhist faith. And finally after ten days, we were ordained by the Abbott Koshin Ohtani of Nishi-Hongwanji under a very, very solemn candlelight ceremony in Amidha Chapel in Kyoto.

TSUDA: Please tell us all the things that you had to do that led to it. I remember you were telling me about how you had to sit, how you had to have a partner, and all...there were many things you had to go through in order to come to this state of ordination.

KIMURA: When we first arrived at the training center, we were given rules that we had to follow. On the first day, we had to take all our makeup off and then we had to wear the robe, minister's robe, and we were not permitted to leave the compound until we completed the training. We woke up 5:30 in the morning, and were asked to clean all the compounds according to the assignments. And it's something like cleaning the bathroom (laughter), cleaning the bathtubs, cleaning the yard. It was around autumn time. We had to rake and sweep all the fallen leaves in the temple grounds, and we had to even vacuum the stairways and...anyways, it was some kind of a training I was never used to it. And after that, we had to go outside to exercise for about twenty minutes; and, after that, we had breakfast. By that



time, it was about 8:00 o'clock in the morning.

TSUDA: What did the breakfast consist of?

KIMURA: Well, we were expecting to have just "okai," you know, the rice gruel and miso-shiru, miso soup; but fortunately, I guess, this group consisted of sixty years and older senior citizens, so the food was just excellent. We had toast some mornings, we had miso-shiru, and we used to have ham and eggs and it was a very nice breakfast. And, after breakfast, we were rushed again, by all these, about six young instructors who were all ordained ministers. They're about the age of our sons and daughters and we were pushed. Among the fifty-four people who went through this training, there were many retired principals of education, some priests; some business people, you know, not only educators, but there were a lot of people in different professions. Some were even doctors, too. And it was kind of a big blow to us, that we had to just follow this (laughter) schedule that was awaiting for us. Then after breakfast, we had to go to the study hall and we had to listen to the lectures.

TSUDA: Did you chant, too?

KIMURA: Oh, chanting came a little later. Oh, excuse me, before that we had morning service, that's right, morning service. And then after that,



followed this very, very strict order of study lectures; and the lecture started from 9:00 o'clock on to about quarter to twelve, and now we have a quick lunch (laughter). It's kind of funny because we used to stuff our food into our mouths, not enjoying the food (laughter), because we used to eat our meals only within twenty minutes. And after that, we gathered in the study hall again and continued our lectures. And around 3:00 o'clock, we would have an examination every day. And, after that, we started chanting, and learning all the different sutras; and also we were given the opportunity to sutra chant. I was very, very surprised by the modern sutra chanting; they used the organ to give us the pitch and the right rhythm. And, after that, we had dinner again; and, after dinner, we had some more services. And, after that, we had to...we went through this training on how to conduct different rituals such as ritual for big memorial services and funerals and such. And then by the time that was completed, it is about eleven. And we are given only about thirty minutes to take our bath, in a public bath. Of course, it's separated from men and women (laughter) and then go to bed.

TSUDA: Did you have to sit on your knees?

KIMURA: Well, all the people had to sit, but I was excused because about two



years ago I had fractured my ankle. So about four of us were excused, because there are older people, too, who couldn't sit at all on the floor.

TSUDA: Did you have a doctor's excuse with you?

KIMURA: Oh, yes, I had a doctor's excuse. It was very nice because since this group was mostly senior citizens, the doctor from the Nishi-Hongwanji Asoka Clinic came just about every other day to examine people. But you had to sort of sign up for it.

TSUDA: So, what's the funniest thing that happened to you during this time?

KIMURA: Well, the funniest thing, let's see, what is the funniest thing? (Laughter). Well, I think the funniest thing that happened was every time I had to dress, it was always in such a rush, I would have the wrong thing on (laughter), and always being told about my appearance. I think that was it. And then another thing I sweated through was, we had to memorize the creed, and it was all in Japanese.

TSUDA: How many pages?

KIMURA: Oh, it's only about a page, but I was practicing this before I entered the training center, but, you know, you get all excited in front of these ministers. I think that was kind of rough. I wasn't the only



one because, as you know, these were mostly retired people. It's not like young people who could remember fast. So I guess it was very, very interesting.

TSUDA: Was it also fun?

KIMURA: It was fun, too, you know. We met lots of people from all over Japan and originally one of my classmates came to visit us in February and stayed one week with us.

TSUDA: Was your classmate female or male?

KIMURA: Female.

TSUDA: What is she doing with her ordination?

KIMURA: She actually didn't fit in our group. She was only forty-eight years old, however, she experienced the death of her husband, whose the head minister, and her son was still in college, only child, only son. So she had to take over the temple. She was excused (age waiver), and, of course, she was a graduate of Ryukoku University already. Without any examination, she came in. But she wasn't prepared, so I was always showing her my papers that I had that was given by my sponsor. And she was very happy about it. Then she had some problems, too, in her family so she decided to visit me really on the spur of the moment. It was nice of her to come and stay with me



for one week. And others have been writing to me and we have been corresponding with each other. This fall I will be going to Japan, so I hope to look them up. And we were even talking about having a reunion in California so I do hope they would come.

TSUDA: Congratulations, Molly! I'm really happy to know that someone with Nisei background could do this, and I know that you are looking forward to using your knowledge and experience.

KIMURA: Yes. Whenever I'm invited to speak, I'll make an effort to try my best. And since I'm able to speak and give sermons in both Japanese and English, I hope I would be able to help to spread Buddhism in the United States.

TSUDA: Since your ordination, you've been invited by the Placer Buddhist Church?

KIMURA: I've been to Enmanji Temple in Sebastopol and also Fresno. Placer Buddhist Church was before I went to Japan. Oh, yes, I went to San Jose--ABA's New Year's installation dinner, and I was the guest speaker. That was in January.

TSUDA: So, do you have your robe and everything now?

KIMURA: Oh, yes. I have one regular robe and one formal robe.

TSUDA: Did they present that to you or did you have to purchase them?



KIMURA: Oh, we had to purchase them. Only thing that was presented to us was one of the Buddhist books and also one yellow "okesa" given by the Abbott.

TSUDA: Can you explain that "okesa?"

KIMURA: Okesa, I guess, this is, more or less, a sort of part of the robe.

TSUDA: A collar?

KIMURA: Yeah. Worn around the collar. They have two different types--one around the collar, and the one that goes from the collar to the left side, to me, it looks like you carry a bag or something in the front.

TSUDA: Only the priest could wear the yellow one?

KIMURA: No, no, no. It's not that. I think that yellow was sort of a significance of completion of the ordination. Those okesas were presented to all of us by the Abbott, because, before that, we were wearing the black type. (The robe and the okesa were black.) Later we had to buy several Buddhist Seiten books--textbooks so that we will be able to continue to study. I'm hoping to continue my studies, but there are so many other activities (laughter).

TSUDA: Okay, the second event that occurred since February 1995 is the planting of the Yoshino cherry trees, so could you please tell us how it came about that you met this Dr. Yoshihiro Hamaguchi and the



events that followed.

KIMURA: About seven years ago, my husband belonged to the Senator Lions Club, and this Lions Club has a sister club in Osaka, Osaka Tezukayama Lions Club. So, about ten people from Sacramento went to this celebration in Osaka; after that, since I have cousins in Hiroshima, many of us decided to visit Hiroshima. And then I asked my cousin Shizuto Nakamura to make arrangements so that this group could attend one of the Hiroshima Lions Club regular meetings. And then it so happened that Dr. Hamaguchi was a tail twister in the club. He's such a talented man as well as a medical doctor, that he gave each one of us a haiku poem that he composed. And it was very impressive; I started to correspond with him because Kaz, you know, couldn't write in Japanese. In fact, I was corresponding for the rest of the members, too. Two years ago Dr. and Mrs. Hamaguchi wanted to visit Sacramento and take a trip to Yosemite. So, at that time, his older brother came, too. So, five of us went to Yosemite. After we came back, I took him to all the sightseeing areas of Sacramento and Lake Tahoe. I also made arrangements so Dr. Hamaguchi could receive a key to the City of Sacramento. At that time, the mayor was not in the office, so City



Councilmember Mr. Jimmy Yee presented the key and pins to Dr. Hamaguchi. He was very elated about this as he went back to Japan. Also, in the meantime, he was asked to resign from Lions Club and organize Hiroshima Rotary Club in Hiroshima City. He became very active, and he, also, became newsletter editor of this organization. So, about ten months ago, he wrote to me saying he wanted to donate some cherry trees. As he started to investigate how to ship the cherry trees, he found out that he couldn't. With all the red tape about spraying, it was very difficult to pass the cherry trees through customs inspection. So finally we found a nursery in Oregon which distributes all the cherry trees to all the nurseries throughout the United States. The local Matsuda Nursery made arrangements so we could purchase those cherry trees. And then the problem came up about the time of the year to plant these trees. Summertime was not the best time so they had the cherry trees stored at the nursery. And then in March, Sacramento City Parks and Recreation Department arborists and a landscape architect got together, and with the assistance of Sacramento Buddhist Church Boy Scout Troop...no, 250, they planted the cherry trees.

TSUDA: So on May 5th, 1996, Sunday, you held that Sakura Tree Dedication



Ceremony.

KIMURA: Yes. Actually that was the only weekend that Dr. Hamaguchi's family could come to dedicate. In the meantime, we had a bronze plaque made with this family's name and the date. So in order to do that we had two gentlemen from Sacramento donating three very, very interesting and appropriate moss covered rocks, and on one of these rocks, the plaque was placed on it.

TSUDA: Who are these two gentlemen?

KIMURA: Mr. Toetsu Ozawa and Mr. Tom Morisawa. It really turned out nicely. And then so we had this very, very solemn, elaborate program of which I was the mistress of ceremony. The taiko group--Koyasan Taiko Children's group--performed before the actual opening of the ceremony. And then Dr. Hamaguchi being Rotarian, I was able to get the President of the Sacramento Rotary Club and he (it's a custom) to exchange banners. All the service clubs do that. And then, also, Councilmember Jimmy Yee presented resolutions from the Mayor and the City Council. It was very interesting and the Hamaguchi family were very happy to attend it.

TSUDA: What do you think is going to happen two years from now when the flowers bloom?



KIMURA: We feel that Dr. Hamaguchi's family will come back again, and I have been thinking about asking the City Department of the City's Parks Division to permit us to have cherry viewing picnics. It might be interesting to have Japanese cultural programs. Make it a Cherry Blossom Festival.

TSUDA: My, that would be wonderful. And you said something about maybe being able to get an interest in building a tea house there?

KIMURA: I hope so (laughter)! That's our dream. I hope it materializes.

TSUDA: That would be good if you had a place for flower arrangements, too.

KIMURA: Well, it's hard to do flower arrangement, in a tokonoma--not tokonoma--but tea ceremony room. But, I think it's nice to have the tea ceremony group, too, you know, sort of maintain the building. There is such an opportunity to have this tea ceremony building.

TSUDA: That would be a wonderful culmination to all the work and all the education, experience that you have gathered throughout your life.

KIMURA: Oh, yes. Now's the time that I like to share everything, so. But still I'm still busy. Last week, you know, for three days I had interpreting jobs (laughter).

TSUDA: Whom were you helping?

KIMURA: One--two days, we had two business people in the garden supply



business from Niigata. So, I didn't know this but Stockton has the redwood box planter factory (Four Seasons Company, President Robert Mathews) and also fertilizer factories. Well, I guess you don't call it factories but plants. And then on the third day, Wednesday, I had to interpret for a lawyer who is working with a family whose parents do not speak English.

TSUDA: So your life continues to be very interesting. I know that you have really dedicated your life in helping the Japanese people, both here and abroad, to communicate better, to bridge and expand our cultures, and understand each other.

KIMURA: Well, I'm grateful for all my blessings so far, so I'd like to play the role of bridge between the two cultures. I think this is very important.

TSUDA: I think that you have done it well. Now, in parting, what last words would you like to say?

KIMURA: Well, since I'm propagating ikebana, too, I'd like to share its "friendship through flowers" to people all over the world. That is one of the catchwords that we have been using.

TSUDA: So this is the end, then?

KIMURA: Yes.



TSUDA: This concludes the oral history project with Molly Miyako Kimura.

Thank you very much.

[End Tape 2, Side A].



Molly Miyako Kimura

Native of Yuba City California. Educated in Marysville, Calif.

Studied Japanese Language for 15 years at Marysville Japanese Language School

Studied Ikebana (Japanese Flower Arranging) for 15 years.

Visited Japan to study Ikebana at Ikenobo School in 1965  
1969, 1977

Holds Teaching Certificates - Ikenobo Flower Arranging

Holds Teaching certificate - Japanese Sandpainting -Suna-e

Holds Teaching Certificate - Japanese Lute music -Biwa

Oct. 1992 graduated from 3 years study program from Buddhist

University Chuo Institute Correspondence course on Buddhist studies

Cultural Affiliations:

Co-Founder and past president and at present 1st vice president  
Sacramento Chapter Ikebana International

Teaches Ikebana classes for American River College Community  
Services Dept. Teaches private classes at home. Taught

classes at Sacramento City College and Davis Art Center.

Member and Board member of Northern California Ikenobo Society.

Holds Ikenobo Ikebana teaching credentials from Kyoto head-  
quarters with professional title "Tofu".

Demonstrates Ikebana and other Japanese culture to garden clubs,  
schools, service clubs throughout Northern California.

U.S. Representative for Yoshikawa Sandpainting School of Tokyo

Has professional title "Shuto" with assistant teacher's certifica'

Has teacher's credential for Japanese Music Biwa with  
professional title "Kyokuto"

Studied Tea Ceremony and is member of Urasenke, Sacramento Chapter

In 1970 coordinated UCD Extension Course on "Japanese Culture"

and attended by 200 educators from many cities in No. Calif.

In 1976 served on the writing team to compile a textbook

"Sharing Japanese American Diversity" sponsored by Sacramento  
School District.

Acts as interpreter and narrator for many visiting Japanese  
artists, musicians and dancers.

Organized cultural tours to Japan and China.

In 1988 and 1989 served as panel member for the California Arts

Council Traditional Folk Arts Program Master-Apprentice Grant.

Club Affiliations:

Board Member of Matsuyama-Sacramento Sister City Corp. from 1981.

Board Member and Corresponding Secretary of Jinan, China-

Sacramento Sister City Corp from 1985.

Has lead tours to China in 1981, 1983 and 1985 sponsored by

Chinese Buddhist Association with headquarters in Beijing, China

Member of Sacramento Convention & Visitors Bureau, assisting

Japanese Visitors. In 1983 visited Tokyo as interpreter

for Convention Bureau to attend Int. Travel Industry World Conv



Awards:

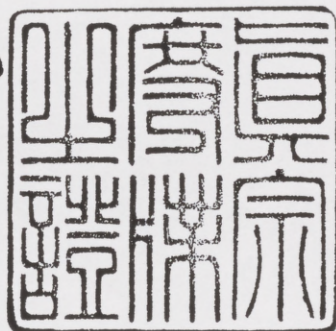
- 1969 - Sacramento YWCA Cultural Award
- 1971 - Recipient of one of the 10 Women of the Year Award  
by Sacramento Union newspaper.
- 1987 - Recipient of Western Adult Buddhist League "Kyogoku Award"  
for outstanding Buddhist Sunday School Teacher.
- 1987 - Received Resolution from Mayor of Sacramento and  
City Council to celebrate 20th anniversary teacher of  
Ikebana and propagating Japanese culture in Sacramento.
- Mar. 1, 1991 - Recipient of President's Award from Sacramento  
Matsuyama Sister City during Sacramento Camellia Festival  
for serving 10 years in promoting friendship between two cities.
- April 3, 1991 - In Matsuyama, Japan received outstanding  
services in promoting sister cities exchanges between two  
cities for 10 years. Presented by Mayor of Matsuyama, Japan.



第七七二四号

国籍 米国

木村 都



大正十三年 三月 一日 生

右の者を度して  
本宗僧侶となし  
法名芳恩を授けて  
滋賀教区護法組遠久寺  
衆徒に加える

平成七年十一月十二日







HONPA HONGWANJI

KYOTO JAPAN

No. 7724

# CERTIFICATE

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

*MIYAKO KIMURA*

ordained

*SHAKU HO-ON*

Birthdate: March 1, 1924

A citizen of the United States of America

has been ordained a preist affiliated with Enkyu-ji Temple, Goho  
Section, Shiga District of Jodo Shinshu Hongwanji-ha, on

November 12, 1995.

Done on this Twelveth Day of November, 1995.





VISIT TO QUITO CITY, ECUADOR (SOUTH AMERICA) TO  
DEMONSTRATE IKEBANA

What a wonderful adventure it was for Molly Tofu Kimura and Laura Louie of Sacramento, Ca. to travel to the city of Quito, capital of Ecuador, South America, a spot in the middle of the world, in response to an invitation from Quito Chapter Ikebana International, Chapter No. 233. Molly was invited to demonstrate Art of Ikenobo Ikebana at the organization's 10th Anniversary Celebration and conduct 2 full days of workshop.

The members, all enthusiastic Ikenobo arrangers, were delighted with the presentations and workshops presented by Mrs. Kimura. Among the guests and participants were Japan's Ambassador's wife, Mrs. Reiko Suzuki and Mrs. Zoe Valencia, wife of Columbia's Ambassador to Quito.

The participants were particularly delighted as Molly also spoke about the philosophy and history of Ikebana. It was an exhilarating week of choosing flowers, tree and grass materials which Quito has no shortage. The members enthusiastically invited Mrs. Kimura to return next year to repeat the demonstration and expand on the workshops.

Submitted by Laura Louie  
(May 2 -10, 1998)



Tuesday, July 8, 1997

WASHINGTON — During the Sakura Matsuri here, Molly Kyokuto Kimura of Sacramento was invited by the Japan America Society of Washington, D.C. to perform biwa music.

Many East Coast musicians and dancers, as well as guest artists from Japan, participated in the program.

On April 15, Kimura was invited to give a lecture/demonstration at Ullrich Recital Hall, Uni-

versity of Maryland, sponsored by the Department of Asian and East European Languages and Culture and the Committee on East Asian Studies.

She was greeted by Professors Lindsay Yotsukura and Miyuki Yoshikami, among others. Since the students were hearing the music for the first time, they were very enthusiastic. They were knowledgeable about Japanese history and expressed great interest in the music.

On April 18, Shizumi Shigeto Manale, an interpretive dancer of East and West, performed "Waltz with the Moon," which she choreographed and directed. She presented Japanese poetry dating from the Yayoi period (300 BC to 300 AD) to the 20th century through her interpretive dance and dramatic stage readings in both classical Japanese and English.

After doing much research, she was able to direct and perform at the Japan Information and Culture Center Theater in Washington, D.C., sponsored by the Japanese Embassy's Cultural Department.

Manale collaborated on biwa music for the performance, and Kimura participated. Other performers were actor/professor Willy Conley of Gallaudet University, conceptual sound artist Yukio Fujimoto, narrator and journalist Kenichi Haraguchi, soprano vocalist and physician Dr. Noriko Hunter, composer Joseph McIntyre, shakuhachi player and mathematician Masahiro Nishihama, and sign-language specialist Tim McLeary.

Manale attempted to mix traditional Japanese dance and the freedom of Western artistic dance into a look at the moon through the eyes of a Japanese artist. This unique combination of Japanese heart and the Western sense of expression helped the audience to see the moon as they had never seen it before.

Manale and Kimura also had the honor of meeting Japanese Ambassador to the U.S. Kunihiro



Matsuri Profile:

Chikuzen Biwa by Kyokuto Molly Kimura

Music presented at this year's Sakura Matsuri promises to be two things: challenging and enlightening. Historically and culturally remote, both the biwa and the Tsugaru Shamisen require focus for a novice audience. The evolution of one instrument begot the other and both continue a legacy capable of transporting a contemporary audience back through time and place to an enchanted life.

The biwa first came to Japan from China. Like the lute, it evolved over centuries and across cultures into many sizes and shapes. Biwa was once the property of wandering blind Buddhist priests. One story recounts blind-biwa-playing priests exorcizing bad spirits to prevent natural calamities. Some of the most famous biwa narratives, such as The Heike Story about the battle between the Heike and Genji clans, were stories of war. Japan's greatest historical tales and biographies are preserved in the songs of the biwa layer-singer-story teller just as the Illiad and the Odyssey were preserved by ancient Greek musicians. These stories as told by the balladeer are legends of brave warriors and beautiful women in their moments of glory and death.

Biwa stories are encrypted in an old fashioned Japanese language as inaccessible to most contemporary Japanese as Shakespearean narrative is for speakers of English. The music itself is as difficult to appreciate as it is to play. The sound of the instrument is twangy and the vocal recitation is tense and the patterns of each (instrumental and vocals) are not performed simultaneously. Because of these difficulties, Chikuzen Biwa is one of Japan's lost art forms - soon to be extinct if not for the efforts of Kyokuto Molly Kimura.

Kyokuto Molly Kimura, a native of California, is the only professional biwa performer in the U.S. and one of very few such performers in Japan. She began studying biwa at the age of nine under Madam Kyokuso Yamamoto of San Francisco, received her professional name "Kyokuto" when she was 16 and has performed biwa for over 55 years. She received her teacher's certificate from Headmaster Kyokuso Tachibana of Tokyo in 1958, but because of the music's inherent difficulties, it has only been in the last two years that she was able to successfully recruit new students to the art, one of whom will perform with her at her east coast premier that takes place at the Sakura Matsuri.

Kyokuto Molly Kimura is an energetic, community-involved and multi-talented woman. She was recently ordained a Buddhist priest in Kyoto having taken a correspondence course. Despite having grown up in the U.S. she is fluent in Japanese. Ms. Kimura is co-founder of the Sacramento Chapter of Ikebana International, dabbles in suna-e (sand painting) and Urasenke Tea Ceremony, is certified for Adult Education, has served in many educational capacities to further the study of Japanese culture, acts as interpreter for visiting Japanese artists, is involved in sister-city programs, organizes tours to Asia, sits on art related boards, and has received numerous awards in both countries for her community involvement and dedication to promoting awareness of Japanese culture.



Kyokuto Molly Kimura says she enjoys the challenge of creating an appreciation for biwa despite the music's ancient history and near extinction, remote language and musical complexity. Unlike the biwa players of an earlier age, Ms. Kimura is not blind, she is a woman and an American. This Buddhist priestess who wanders to us from the west coast promises to teach us how to understand the expression of feelings and emotions of biwa.

More about the music: Biwa is harmonic rather than melodic. It has four-strings and is played with broad wooden pick ("bachi"). Whereas with the guitar has strings near to the finger board and when pressed release a definite pitch, biwa strings are set far from the neck and the frets are more than an inch high. A biwa player releases a variety of pitches depending on how hard they press on the string. The most characteristic element of the biwa's tone is the "sawari," the reverberation created when the twang of the string resounds in the body of the instrument. As with opera singers, biwa singers are known to prolong selective phrases with vocal improvisation. Well-informed fans wait for these moments and commend them with shouts of approval. The audience at this year's Sakura Matsuri may not be able to understand the songs nor know when these special musical moments occur but every effort to appreciate the mood of biwa will be rewarded by the joy of mystery. Then we will be prepared and even more delighted by the performance of Tsugaru Shamisen by the renowned Chikujou Ichikawa which sprang from the biwa tradition.